



Wartime Richmond: The Bar at the Spotswood Hotel.

## Heroes, Profiteers, Bomb-Proofs

THE BELEAGUERED CITY. Richmond 1861-65. By Alfred Hoyt Bill. 313 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$3.

By DOUGLAS SOUTHALL FREEMAN

IN this brief volume a well-furnished student of the War Between the States has undertaken to describe the life of Richmond, Va., during the years that city was capital of the war-wrung Confederacy. Mr. Bill writes clearly and uses effectively the standard, published authorities. He has had access, also, to a file of The Richmond Examiner, the vehement anti-Administration paper. All that can be done by a man to understand the elusive spirit of a city with traditions not his own, Mr. Bill has done with scholarly care.

By the census of 1860 Richmond had a population of 37,000. Before the end of the war that number had risen to an estimated 100,000. Few additional residences were built. Congestion would have been beyond endurance if it had not been customary to put two or three double beds in the large chambers of existing homes. That was a solution of the "housing crisis" not possible in a day when a "bed" room is distinctly singular.

AMONG the 60,000 who came to live in Richmond were many of the leading men of the South, hundreds of women refugees from Virginia plantations, endless processions of sick and wounded soldiers, their anxious families—and a multitude of the undesirables of every dark dye. Blockade runners of questionable loyalty elbowed men engaged in secret trading with the enemy. New Orleans gamblers tried their tricks on Baltimore card sharps. Prostitutes arrived from everywhere and nowhere. The

town seemed full of spies whose clumsiness was outdone only by that of the provost marshal's guard, the M. P.'s of the day.

Over this swollen and diverse population Government exercised no restraints other than those of peacetime law. Public men insisted that the Southern States had seceded as a protest against the violation of the Federal Constitution by the North: they would not themselves override the very rights they were fighting to defend. Every trader was free to sell what he had at any price he could get for it. The most that Government ever did, even when the scanty supply of salt or flour had been cornered, was to release a little from Army stores at lower prices. To the last gasp of a bankrupt treasury, money changers were at liberty to speculate in gold and to depress Government credit by beating down Confederate currency as fast and as far as they could. The self-restraint of Government was constitutionalism gone mad. Public policy expressed the logic of suicide.

HOW Richmond survived in the face of all this is part of the theme of Mr. Bill. He does not displace his values. Richmond became the symbol of Southern resistance primarily because the best military resources of the Confederacy and the highest military skill were employed to protect it. Half a score of other elements of successful defense are mentioned by Mr. Bill. Perhaps the least understood of them was the religion of the dominant majority and, in particular, of the women. In common with almost all other Southern cities of that era, Richmond had a high rate of communicable dis-

ease. Cholera had threatened the city more than once. In 1855 yellow fever had come as close as Norfolk. Typhoid was the expected scourge of summer. Illness and death always were near. Religion was largely a doctrine of the acceptance of misery as preparation for the bliss of eternity. This was a faith that responded completely to the appeal of General Lee and of his like-minded lieutenants. Soldiers became preachers; public men put on the robe of prophets. The faithful were exhorted to endure hardships that would, in "God's good time," be rewarded with victory. War was the sternest discipline of souls that sought peace—strange paradox!



General Robert E. Lee.